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ABSTRACT

A policy of the Victoria (Australia) government is to provide all Victorian children access to 1 year of preschool prior to entry into the formal education system. This paper provides an overview of preschool programs funded by the Department of Health and Community Services (H&CS) during 1994. The first section of the report gives a statistical overview of the 1994 preschool program. This section contains the 1994 funded enrollment figure, that is, the total number of enrollments which attracted funding in February 1994, or later in the year as additional enrollments. These figures represent the official 1994 preschool figures. Also included in this section is information relating to the number of preschool locations which received State Government preschool funding in 1994 as well as other programs for children offered from these locations. The second section provides analyses of the data, collected primarily via the "Preschool Monitoring Form-1994, under the following topics: Enrollments, Koorie Children, Children from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), Health Card Holders, Fees, Program Delivery, Staff Hours, Volunteer Contribution, and Support Services. These analyses indicate that participation in preschool programs was very high, with 93.3 percent of eligible 4-year-olds attended preschool. However, only half of eligible Koorie children attending preschool. Children with NESB backgrounds comprised 15.2 percent of 1994 preschool population, concentrated in metropolitan regions. Approximately 30 percent of 1994 enrollments were Health Card holders. There was a trend toward greater flexibility in program delivery in 1994. Overall, it appears that initial fears that preschool programs would have to either close or increase fees to operate under new funding conditions were unfounded, although volunteer hours play a large part in maintaining programs. (WJC)

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HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Preschools 1994

December 1995 95/0136

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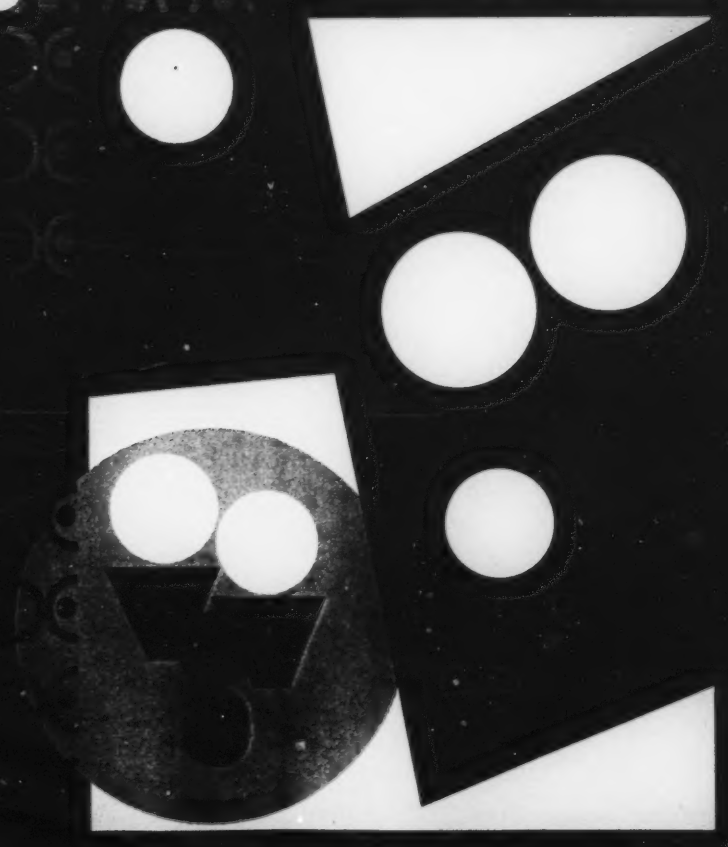

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Introduction

Overview

The Victorian Government's policy is to provide access to one year of preschool for all Victorian children prior to the year of entry into the formal education system. This paper provides an overview of preschool programs funded by the Department of Health and Community Services (H&CS) during 1994. It has been organised into two sections as follows:

The first section gives a statistical overview of the 1994 preschool program. It contains the 1994 funded enrolment figure, that is, the total number of enrolments which attracted funding in February 1994 or later in the year as additional enrolments. This figure includes the confirmed enrolments as collected in February 1994 as well as the additional children who enrolled in preschool after the data collection in February. The funded enrolment data was 'ongoing' in that agencies were able to apply for funding for additional enrolments until 19 August 1994. These figures represent the official 1994 preschool figures. Also included in this section is information relating to the number of preschool locations which received State Government preschool funding in 1994 as well as other programs for children offered from these locations.

The second section provides an analysis of the data, collected primarily via the *Preschool Monitoring Form—1994*, under the following topics:

- ***Enrolments***—the number of children attending preschool during 1994 and issues in relation to fluctuations in enrolments throughout the year.
- ***Koorie Children***—the number of Koorie children attending preschool in February 1994 and August 1994 as well as the reasons for any movement of Koorie children during these months.
- ***Children from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)***—the number of NESB children attending preschool in February 1994 and August 1994, reasons for any fluctuations in NESB enrolments and the main language groups represented.
- ***Health Card Holders (HC)***—the number of children who were recipients of the HC grant during 1994 as well as the way in which the $75 HC grant was used.
- ***Fees***—fee levels charged by preschool locations recorded by type, geographic area (metropolitan or non-metropolitan), funding category and the percentage of HC holders attending the location as well as the number of children paying full/partial fees or who left during the year due to the inability to pay the required fee.
- ***Program Delivery***—a comparison of 1993 and 1994 data in relation to the number of preschool groups operating, weekly hours of attendance and program operation patterns.
- ***Staff Hours***—the proportion of teacher time devoted to teaching/non teaching duties during 1994 as well as the number of staff employed to operate the funded preschool program.
- ***Volunteer Contribution***—the number of volunteer hours contributed by members of the committee as well as the volunteer

input of the general parent body.

- ***Support Services***—utilisation of State Government funded preschool support services during 1994.

1994 Data Collections

The information from four data collections undertaken by the department during 1994 has been used as the framework for this paper. Under the conditions of the Funding and Service Agreement with H&CS, funded agencies receiving preschool funding are required to provide H&CS with data. The four data collections undertaken by the Department during 1994 were:

Confirmed Enrolments for 1994.
All agencies applying for preschool funding were required to submit details for each location of the confirmed 1994 enrolments in February 1994. The enrolment information was collected via a survey form, *Confirmed Enrolments for 1994*, and provides a 'snapshot' of the number of children enrolled at the time of the survey. The data obtained from this survey formed the basis on which the 1994 per capita and HC grants were paid. Information on fee levels and other programs for children operating from the same location was also collected at this time. Data is reported on the basis of 1,307 individual locations.

Preschool Audit.
The preschool audit was conducted during April 1994 and surveyed a randomly selected sample of 184 preschool locations with independent management bodies as the funded agency. The preschool audit was conducted in response to the 1993 *Auditor General's Report on Ministerial Portfolios* and as part of the accountability requirements for preschools which were in receipt of Government funding. It was considered particularly important to conduct an audit in the first year of the new funding arrangements. The data obtained from the preschool audit provides a 'snapshot' of preschool operation at the time of the audit. A summary of the audit findings was published in the H&CS publication *Information Update* in June 1994.

Preschool Monitoring Survey.
Monitoring data for 1994 was collected by means of a survey form, the *Preschool Monitoring Form—1994*. This form was sent to all funded agencies receiving State Government preschool funding as at 1 August 1994. The survey population consisted of 1,275 preschools, including 1,204 centre-based preschools, 55 long day care centres, 5 mobile preschools and 11 outreach preschools. Data was not collected from the 48 individual mobile and outreach preschool locations, but rather from the 16 funded agencies. Their returns were treated as one location representative of the operation of all locations under their control. The data from the monitoring survey is therefore reported on the basis of 1,275, not 1,307, locations.

Preschool monitoring forms were returned by 100 per cent of funded agencies. The questionnaire sought information about current program operation, users and utilisation as at 1 August 1994 and, therefore, provides a 'snapshot' of program operation at that time.

Additional Enrolments and Health Card Holders.

In addition to the enrolment data collected in February 1994, funded agencies were able to apply for funding for:

- New, additional enrolments of children who had commenced preschool after the confirmed data collection in February 1994 and were enrolled by 19 August 1994.
- Additional HC holders who did not receive a HC grant in February 1994 and had been/were on a HC at any time between February 1994 and 19 August 1994.

The additional enrolment data was obtained from applications for funding sent to the department by individual agencies. The additional HC data was collected via an application form sent to all funded agencies in August 1994. Both these data collections were 'ongoing' in that agencies were able to apply for funding for additional enrolments until 19 August 1994.

The monitoring data, collected in August 1994, is the primary focus of this paper as this data has not been previously analysed. In some instances in the report, the monitoring data has been compared with the enrolment data collected in February 1994, funded enrolment data for 1994 and with the audit sample data collected in April 1994.

Statistical Overview

Introduction

Major changes to the funding of preschools occurred in 1994. The subsidy allocation system of funding per group of children was replaced by per capita grants, based on the actual number of eligible children enrolled. The three-tier per capita grant payment system commenced on January 24 1994, with a further higher level of grant being introduced for small, isolated rural preschool locations in February 1994. Additional funding of $75 per child per annum for low income parents in receipt of Commonwealth Health Cards was also introduced. Preschool funding was provided to long day care centres for the first time in 1994.

The Central Payments system for the payment of preschool staff officially ceased operation on 23 January 1994 and management bodies became responsible for the payment of their staff. To assist independent preschool management committees with this task, the department funded a payroll support service for those independent management committees who wished to use it.

Enrolments

During 1994, the State Government provided funding for a total of 56,171 preschool enrolments. This total funded enrolment figure is based on the total number of enrolments attracting funding in February 1994 or later in the year as an additional enrolment. This figure therefore includes the confirmed enrolments as collected in February 1994 (55,861 enrolments) as well as the additional children who enrolled in preschool programs after the data collection in February (310 enrolments). *Chart 1* (see page 7) provides a regional breakdown of the total number of funded 1994 preschool enrolments by funding category as well as the total number of children who received the HC grant for 1994, that is, the number of funded HC holders. These figures represent the final, and therefore official, 1994 preschool enrolment figures.

The vast majority (86.3 per cent) of enrolments were funded at $800, with the new category of preschool funding for children attending a long day care centre accounting for 1.7 per cent of enrolments. This proportion of enrolments in long day care centres can be expected to increase gradually as the availability of this funding becomes more widely known and long day care centres refocus their operation to include a preschool program, where demand exists in the community. In 1994, 32.5 per cent of funded enrolments also received the additional $75 Health Card funding, however, due to the method of payment in 1994, it is likely that fewer enrolments than 32.5 per cent were actually in receipt of a Health Card at any one time. (The February 'snapshot' data collection recorded 28.0 per cent and the August 'snapshot' data collection recorded 29.9 per cent—see the section on 'Health Cards', page 18). The proportion of funded HC holders was much higher in H&CS rural regions than in metropolitan regions, with figures of 43.4 per cent and 27.2 per cent respectively.

Of the 56,171 funded enrolments, 54,814 children or 97.6 per cent were attending

preschool for the first time in 1994 and 1,357 children or 2.4 per cent were funded to attend a second year of preschool. Based on all funded first year attendances for 1994, the proportion of the eligible 4 year old population having a preschool experience in 1994 was 93.3 per cent, after the population was adjusted for changes to the school entry age. This compares with a participation rate of 92.8 per cent calculated in February 1994 based on confirmed first year enrolments at that time. In both cases, the eligible 4 year old population was adjusted downwards to take account of the projected impact of the changes to the school entry age in 1995.

Second Year Enrolments

The figure of 2.4 per cent for second year attendances in 1994 compares with 4 per cent of children returning for a second year of preschool in 1993. This decrease in the number of children having a second year of preschool may be a result of increased preschool fee levels for 1994, the new second year assessment procedures linked to regional Specialist Children's Services teams, pressure for children to enrol at primary school or children with disabilities remaining in early intervention services rather than attending preschools. A comparative regional analysis of first and second year enrolments for 1993 and 1994 is contained in *chart 2* (see page 8).

Preschool Locations

In February 1994, 1,278 preschools at 1,310 locations were approved by the Minister to receive preschool funding. However, during 1994, three locations returned their preschool funding. Hence, during 1994, preschool funding was provided to 1,275 preschools at 1,307 locations, including:

- 1,204 centre based preschools.
- 55 long day care centres.
- 48 mobile and outreach preschool locations (for 16 outreach or mobile preschools).

Of the 1,307 preschool locations, 26.9 per cent were managed by local government and 73.1 per cent were managed by volunteer committees of management or management arrangements in long day care centres or non-government schools. A breakdown of these preschools by management structure and region is included in *chart 3* (see page 9).

Other Programs for Children

The data showed that 974 locations or 74.4 per cent offered at least one other program for children as well as preschool, with 368 locations or 28.1 per cent offering preschool as well as two or more other programs for children. This model of operation is in line with the government's policy direction of encouraging multipurpose children's services facilities. *Chart 4* (see page 10) provides details of the number of other programs for children offered by location type. It should be noted that locations have been counted more than once in chart 4.

Preschool Enrolments

Chart 1

Column reference	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k
H&CS Region	Funded 1994 Enrolments (N)	Basic (N)	% of Total	Isolated Rural (N)	% of Total	Small Isolated Rural (N)	% of Total	Long Day Care (N)	% of Total	Funded Health Card holders (N)	% of Total
Barwon-South Western	4,674	3,317	71.0%	1,186	25.4%	70	1.5%	101	2.2%	1,783	38.1%
Gippsland	3,707	2,223	60.0%	1,418	38.3%	49	1.3%	17	0.5%	1,522	41.1%
Grampians	2,460	1,770	72.0%	586	23.8%	104	4.2%	0	0.0%	1,249	50.8%
Hume	3,836	2,134	55.6%	1,530	39.9%	172	4.5%	0	0.0%	1,641	42.8%
Loddon-Mallee	3,671	2,544	69.3%	906	24.7%	191	5.2%	30	0.8%	1,777	48.4%
Eastern Metropolitan	10,538	10,121	96.0%	227	2.2%	10	0.1%	180	1.7%	2,148	20.4%
Northern Metropolitan	7,254	7,126	98.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	128	1.8%	2,280	31.4%
Southern Metropolitan	11,890	11,202	94.2%	226	1.9%	11	0.1%	451	3.8%	3,294	27.7%
Western Metropolitan	8,141	8,048	98.9%	23	0.3%	0	0.0%	70	0.9%	2,567	31.5%
Total Metropolitan	37,823	36,497	96.5%	476	1.3%	21	0.1%	829	2.2%	10,289	27.2%
Total Non-Metropolitan	18,348	11,988	65.3%	5,626	30.7%	586	3.2%	148	0.8%	7,972	43.4%
Total Victoria	56,171	48,485	86.3%	6,102	10.9%	607	1.1%	977	1.7%	18,261	32.5%

Explanatory notes : Data is current as at November 1994

Column reference a — Total funded enrolments for 1994

Column reference b — Total of basic grant enrolments ($800 grant per annum)

Column reference c — Percentage (%) = Basic grant enrolments (column b) divided by funded enrolments (column a)

Column reference d — Total of isolated rural grant enrolments ($1000 grant per annum)

Column reference e — Percentage (%) = Isolated rural grant enrolments (column d) divided by funded enrolments (column a)

Column reference f — Total of small isolated rural grant enrolments ($1500 grant per annum)

Column reference g — Percentage (%) = Small isolated rural grant enrolments (column f) divided by funded enrolments (column a)

Column reference h — Total of long day care grant enrolments ($370 grant per annum)

Column reference i — Percentage (%) = Long day care grant enrolments (column h) divided by funded enrolments (column a)

Column reference j — Total of funded Health Card holders (additional $75 grant per annum)

Column reference k — Percentage (%) = Health Card holders (column j) divided by funded enrolments (column a)

First and Second Year Enrolments

Chart 2

	1993			1994					
Column reference	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j
H&CS Region	Funded 1993 Enrolments *(N)*	Funded 1993 1st years *(N)*	% of Total	Funded 1993 2nd years *(N)*	% of Total	Funded 1994 Enrolments *(N)*	Funded 1994 1st years *(N)*	% of Total	Funded 1994 2nd years *(N)*	% of Total
Barwon South Western	4,883	4,628	94.8%	255	5.2%	4,674	4,543	97.2%	131	2.8%
Gippsland	3,952	3,714	94.0%	238	6.0%	3,707	3,595	97.0%	112	3.0%
Grampians	2,615	2,524	96.5%	91	3.5%	2,460	2,413	98.1%	47	1.9%
Hume	4,027	3,893	96.7%	134	3.3%	3,836	3,756	97.9%	80	2.1%
Loddon Mallee	3,854	3,713	96.3%	141	3.7%	3,671	3,586	97.7%	85	2.3%
Eastern Metropolitan	11,339	10,957	96.6%	382	3.4%	10,538	10,247	97.2%	291	2.8%
Northern Metropolitan	8,004	7,740	96.7%	264	3.3%	7,254	7,079	97.6%	175	2.4%
Southern Metropolitan	12,503	12,036	96.3%	467	3.7%	11,890	11,695	98.4%	195	1.6%
Western Metropolitan	8,601	8,251	95.9%	350	4.1%	8,141	7,900	97.0%	241	3.0%
Total Metropolitan	40,447	38,984	96.4%	1,463	3.6%	37,823	36,921	97.6%	902	2.4%
Total Non-Metropolitan	19,331	18,472	95.6%	859	4.4%	18,348	17,893	97.5%	455	2.5%
Total Victoria	59,778	57,456	96.1%	2,322	3.9%	56,171	54,814	97.6%	1,357	2.4%

Explanatory notes : Data is current as at November 1994

Column reference a — Total of funded first year and second year enrolments for 1993

Column reference b — Total of funded first year enrolments for 1993

Column reference c — Percentage (%) = First year enrolments (column b) divided by funded enrolments (column a)

Column reference d — Total of funded second year enrolments for 1993

Column reference e — Percentage (%) = Second year enrolments (column d) divided by funded enrolments (column a)

Column reference f — Total of funded first year and second year enrolments for 1994

Column reference g — Total of funded first year enrolments for 1994

Column reference h — Percentage (%) = First year enrolments (column g) divided by funded enrolments (column f)

Column reference i — Total of funded second year enrolments for 1994

Column reference j — Percentage (%) = Second year enrolments (column i) divided by funded enrolments (column f)

Number of Preschool Programs By Management Arrangement

Chart 3

H&CS Region	Independently Managed			Local Government Managed			Non-Government Schools
	Preschool	Mob/Out Locations	Long Day Care	Preschool	Mob/Out Locations	Long Day Care	
Barwon South Western	68	0	2	37	3	0	1
Gippsland	38	4	2	46	0	0	2
Grampians	54	5	0	6	2	0	1
Hume	51	16	0	37	0	1	0
Loddon Mallee	63	12	2	13	4	0	1
Eastern Metropolitan	173	0	10	54	2	4	8
Northern Metropolitan	125	0	9	30	0	0	1
Southern Metropolitan	207	0	18	28	0	2	11
Western Metropolitan	65	0	4	81	0	1	3
Total Victoria	844	37	47	332	11	8	28

Explanatory notes: Data is current as at November 1994

Total locations equals 1,307 comprising 1,204 preschools, 55 long day care centres and 48 mobile and outreach locations.

In February 1994, there were 1,310 funded preschool programs. After that time, three locations returned their preschool grant payment.

Definition of Service Type:

Preschool	Centre based preschool
Long Day Care Centre	Long day care centre offering a preschool program
Mob/Out Locations	Locations where mobile and outreach preschool programs are provided

Other Programs for Children

Chart 4

Geographic Area	Number of Other Programs for Children Offered at the Same Location					
	Long Day Care *(N)*	Occasional Care *(N)*	School Age Program *(N)*	3 Year Old Preschool *(N)*	Play Group *(N)*	Maternal & Child Health *(N)*
H&CS Metropolitan Regions						
Preschool	77	70	22	459	182	131
Long Day Care Centre	47	14	12	19	2	3
Mobile/Outreach Preschool	0	0	0	0	0	0
H&CS Non-Metropolitan Regions						
Preschool	19	39	5	189	89	75
Long Day Care Centre	8	3	1	2	2	3
Mobile/Outreach Preschool	2	2	3	17	8	5
Total Victoria						
Preschool	96	109	27	648	271	206
Long Day Care Centre	55	17	13	21	4	6
Mobile/Outreach Preschool	2	2	3	17	8	5

Explanatory notes:

Data is current as at November 1994.

Locations have been counted more than once in this table.

Analysis of the Data

Enrolments

Number of August Enrolments

In this section, the August monitoring data has been compared with both the enrolment data as collected in February 1994 and the 1994 total funded enrolment data. The August monitoring data and the February enrolment data provide 'snapshots' of the number of children attending preschool at the time of the data collection, whereas the funded enrolment data figure is the total number of enrolments which attracted funding in February 1994 or later in the year as additional enrolments.

There was a total of 54,718 children enrolled and attending preschool programs as at 1 August 1994, of whom 67.3 per cent were attending preschool programs in the metropolitan area and 32.7 per cent were attending preschool programs in the non-metropolitan area. These metropolitan and non-metropolitan percentages are the same as those recorded in the February 1994 data collection and for the 1994 total funded enrolments, indicating a consistent pattern of enrolments in metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions.

Of the 54,718 August preschool enrolments, 97.7 per cent of the children were attending preschool for the first time in 1994 (see table 1). This figure of approximately 98 per cent for first year attendances is consistent with that obtained in the February data collection and the 1994 funded enrolments.

Table 1. August Enrolments by Region

H&CS Region	Total Enrols (N)	First Year		Second Year	
		Enrols (N)	% of Total	Enrols (N)	% of Total
Barwon South Western	4,558	4,440	97.4	118	2.6
Grampians	2,403	2,355	98.0	48	2.0
Loddon Mallee	3,618	3,545	98.0	73	2.0
Hume	3,726	3,651	98.0	75	2.0
Gippsland	3,604	3,503	97.2	101	2.8
Total Non-Metropolitan	17,909	17,494	97.7	415	2.3
Eastern Metropolitan	10,262	9,998	97.4	264	2.6
Northern Metropolitan	7,016	6,859	97.8	157	2.2
Southern Metropolitan	11,668	11,479	98.4	189	1.6
Western Metropolitan	7,863	7,639	97.2	224	2.9
Total Metropolitan	36,809	35,975	97.7	834	2.3
Total Victoria	54,718	53,469	97.7	1,249	2.3

Fluctuations in Enrolments

Statewide enrolment figures in the August 1994 'snapshot' data collection were 2.1 per cent lower than those recorded in the February 1994 'snapshot' data collection. There was a total of 55,861 children enrolled and attending preschool programs in February 1994 compared to 54,718 children enrolled and attending preschool programs as at 1 August 1994 (see table 2). This suggests that a number of children who enrolled in February 1994 were no longer attending a preschool program in August 1994. The Statewide total funded enrolment data is, however, higher than both the February and August figures as it includes all eligible children who attracted preschool funding in 1994 and does not take into account any of the children who left during the year.

All regions showed only a minimal change in enrolments between February and August 1994, with the largest decrease being 3.1 per cent for Western Metropolitan in the metropolitan regions and 2.7 per cent for Hume in the non-metropolitan regions. Decreases for the non-metropolitan and metropolitan regions were similar at approximately 2 per cent.

Of those preschool locations with a change in enrolments between these months, the majority (63.2 per cent) increased or decreased their enrolments by only one or two children.

The data, therefore, shows that enrolment numbers can be expected to fluctuate during the year, but only by a relatively small amount.

Table 2. Difference in February and August Enrolments by Region

H&CS Region	Funded 1994 Enrolments *(N)*	February 94 Enrolments *(N)*	August 94 Enrolments *(N)*	Difference (Feb. - Aug.) *(N)*	Difference (Feb. - Aug.) *(%)*
Barwon South Western	4,674	4,658	4,558	-100	-2.2
Grampians	2,460	2,435	2,403	-32	-1.3
Loddon Mallee	3,671	3,642	3,618	-24	-0.7
Hume	3,836	3,831	3,726	-105	-2.7
Gippsland	3,707	3,698	3,604	-94	-2.5
Total Non-Metropolitan	18,348	18,264	17,909	-355	-1.9
Eastern Metropolitan	10,538	10,491	10,262	-229	-2.2
Northern Metropolitan	7,254	7,184	7,016	-168	-2.3
Southern Metropolitan	11,890	11,811	11,668	-143	-1.2
Western Metropolitan	8,141	8,111	7,863	-248	-3.1
Total Metropolitan	37,823	37,597	36,809	-788	-2.1
Total Victoria	56,171	55,861	54,718	-1,143	-2.1

Reasons for Fluctuations in Enrolments

Some fluctuation in enrolment levels is inevitable under a per capita funding system. The August figures suggest that the Government has continued to provide funding for the full year for a number of children who were no longer attending at the preschool location where they were enrolled in February 1994. However, the number of funded places which were not used in 1994 is likely to be less than 1,143 (the difference between the February and August 1994 figures) as some of these children may have filled a funded vacancy at another preschool (thereby in effect using the remainder of their 'funding entitlement' at another location). These children may not have been counted as a 'funded' child at that preschool. Table 15 provides some support for this assumption as 1,047 children were recorded as 'unfunded children', though it is unclear from the data how many of these 1,047 children were eligible preschool children. Others, who left the preschool after the end of term 1 and did not attend another preschool, are considered to have had their year of funded preschool. They were not eligible to be funded again in 1995.

The preschool audit sample in April 1994 cited the main reason for the decrease in enrolments at that time as being due to family movement out of the area (and not, for example, the inability to pay fees). This is confirmed by the monitoring data which shows that, as at 1 August 1994, only 402 children (0.7 per cent) left preschool due to the inability to pay fees (see table 15).

Koorie Children

Number of Koorie Enrolments

In August 1994, there were 201 Koorie children attending funded preschools in Victoria. The data shows that, in both February and August 1994, Koorie children comprised 0.4 per cent of all preschool enrolments (see table 3). This 0.4 per cent participation rate of Koorie children in Victorian preschool programs was about half that of their representation in the 0-4 year old population. The 1991 Census reported Koorie children comprised 0.8 per cent of the 0-4 year old Victorian population (ABS table 1.4, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population).

Koorie children were concentrated in the non-metropolitan regions with Koorie children comprising 0.8 per cent of the total preschool enrolments in these areas in August 1994. Loddon Mallee had the largest proportion of Koorie children with 1.1 per cent of the total children attending preschool programs followed by Hume with 1.0 per cent. Of the metropolitan regions, Northern Metropolitan had the highest proportion of Koorie children attending preschools programs with 0.5 per cent. Table 3 shows the number and percentage of Koorie children in each of the H&CS regions in February and August. Overall, a total of 109 preschool locations (8.7 per cent) indicated that Koorie children were attending preschool at the time of the August data collection or had attended/intended to attend prior to the data collection.

Table 3. Koorie Children by Region

H&CS Region	February 1994 Koorie (N)	February 1994 Enrols (N)	February 1994 Koorie (%)	August 1994 Koorie (N)	August 1994 Enrols (N)	August 1994 Koorie (%)
Barwon South Western	22	4,658	0.5	16	4,558	0.4
Grampians	15	2,435	0.6	16	2,403	0.7
Loddon Mallee	48	3,642	1.3	40	3,618	1.1
Hume	39	3,831	1.0	37	3,726	1.0
Gippsland	38	3,698	1.0	31	3,604	0.9
Total Non-Metropolitan	162	18,264	0.9	140	17,909	0.8
Eastern Metropolitan	5	10,491	0.1	4	10,154	0.1
Northern Metropolitan	37	7,184	0.5	37	7,016	0.5
Southern Metropolitan	9	11,811	0.1	10	11,575	0.1
Western Metropolitan	10	8,111	0.1	10	7,863	0.1
Total Metropolitan	61	37,597	0.2	61	36,608	0.2
Total Victoria	223	55,861	0.4	201	54,517	0.4

Fluctuations in Koorie Enrolments

Although the proportion of funded Koorie enrolments remained consistent from February to August 1994, the data shows that there were 9.9 per cent (22 children) fewer Koorie children attending preschool in August 1994 than in February 1994. This figure compares with a 2.1 per cent decrease in the total preschool enrolments. With one exception, the decreases in Koorie enrolments all occurred in non-metropolitan regions.

Given the Statewide decrease in the Koorie enrolments it is not surprising that fewer locations had Koorie children enrolled in August 1994 (87 locations) than in February 1994 (94 locations).

Reasons for Fluctuations in Koorie Enrolments

The survey requested information from funded agencies about the reasons for any Koorie children leaving between February 1994 and August 1994. Only 31 locations provided a response for this question even though it is clear from the data that more preschools had Koorie children leave between these dates. For example, 8 preschools which had Koorie children enrolled in February 1994 and not in August 1994 did not provide a response.

It should be noted that multiple responses were possible. Five preschools nominated more than one reason; hence the total number of responses to this question was 36 and not 31. Of the 36 responses, 13 (36.1 per cent) concerned the family's

inability to pay the required fee and 10 (27.8 per cent) concerned relocation of the family. The reasons for Koorie children leaving are listed below:

- Inability to pay the required fee 13
- Family moved to another area 10
- Transport difficulties 5
- Not ready for preschool 2
- Program not culturally relevant 2
- Other 4

Included in the 13 responses that indicated Koorie children had left due to the fee, is one that reported that Koorie child/children had been booked to attend in February 1994 but did not attend during 1994.

Children from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)

Definition

A child from a non-English speaking background is defined as a child who was born in a non-English speaking country or who was born in Australia with one or both parents born in a non-English speaking country.

Number of NESB Enrolments

In August 1994, there were 8,303 NESB children attending funded preschools in Victoria which was 15.2 per cent of all children attending preschool in August 1994.

NESB children were concentrated in the metropolitan regions with 95.3 per cent of all NESB enrolments attending preschools in these areas. Western Metropolitan region had the highest proportion of NESB children with 29.6 per cent of all enrolments while Northern Metropolitan region had the second highest with 25.3 per cent. Of the non-metropolitan regions, Barwon South Western region had the highest proportion of NESB children with 1.5 per cent of all enrolments while Loddon Mallee region had the second highest with 1.2 per cent. Table 4 shows the distribution of NESB children across the H&CS regions.

Table 4. NESB Children by Region

H&CS Region	NESB Enrolments Feb. '94 (N)	Aug.'94 (N)	Aug. '94 (%)
Barwon Sth. Western	121	121	1.5
Grampians	13	21	0.3
Loddon Mallee	88	100	1.2
Hume	62	71	0.9
Gippsland	57	76	0.9
Total Non-Metro.	341	389	4.7
Eastern Metro.	1,222	1,314	15.8
Northern Metro.	2,065	2,100	25.3
Southern Metro.	1,880	2,039	24.6
Western Metro.	2,352	2,461	29.6
Total Metropolitan	7,519	7,914	95.3
Total Victoria	7,860	8,303	100.0

A comparison between the preschool participation rate of NESB children and their representation in the 0–4 year old Victorian population cannot be made as ABS has not published information about the number of 0–4 year old NESB children.

Fluctuations in NESB Enrolments

NESB enrolments increased throughout the 1994 preschool year. The data shows (see table 4) an increase of 5.6 per cent in the number of NESB children enrolled in preschools between February 1994 (7,860 NESB enrolments) and August 1994 (8,303 NESB enrolments).

These enrolments were also spread across more locations. A total of 783 preschools (61.4 per cent) indicated that they had NESB children attending as at 1 August 1994 compared to 707 (55.5 per cent) preschools in February 1994.

A greater number of preschools (213 locations) reported more NESB children enrolled in August 1994 compared with February 1994 than preschools which reported fewer NESB children enrolled in August 1994 compared with February 1994 (132 locations).

This confirms advice provided to H&CS by the Multicultural Resource Centre (MRC) that NESB families tend not to enrol their children at the start of the preschool year, perhaps because they are unaware of the availability of this program.

On the other hand, 237 preschool locations reported that NESB children had moved between February and August 1994. The following reasons were given for NESB children leaving:

- Movement of family 195
- Inability to pay required fee 53
- Program not culturally relevant 1
- Other 41

As with the reasons for movement of Koorie children, it should be noted that it was possible for a funded agency to nominate more than one reason.

The main reason given for NESB children leaving a preschool location was family relocation (195 responses). This large response rate is not surprising given there is considerable mobility amongst new arrivals. Family relocation was also the major reason given in the preschool audit for the movement of children. It is possible that these children re-enrolled at another preschool location but data is not available to substantiate this assumption. However, inability to pay fees, the second most frequent response (53 responses), was not commonly cited in the preschool audit as a reason for departure from preschool locations, yet it does appear to be an issue for NESB families as it is for Koorie families.

Language Background of NESB Children

Table 5 shows the language backgrounds of NESB children by region and a breakdown of ten major languages. The totals contained in table 5 do not equal the regional totals contained in table 4 as funded agencies were not requested to provide details about the language backgrounds of all children enrolled, only those in the ten groups listed. Statewide, the largest group of NESB children was children from an Italian language background (1,046 children), followed by children from a Vietnamese language background (948 children), children from a Chinese language background (919 children) and children from a Greek

language background (817 children).

Comparatively, the largest pockets of individual NESB groups were:

- 426 Italian children in Northern Metropolitan region
- 406 Vietnamese children in Western Metropolitan region
- 324 Chinese children in Eastern Metropolitan region
- 240 Arabic children in Northern Metropolitan region
- 235 Indian children in Southern Metropolitan region
- 227 Turkish children in Northern Metropolitan region

Table 5. Language Background of NESB Children by Region

H&CS Region	Arab. *(N)*	Chin.* *(N)*	Croat. *(N)*	Greek *(N)*	Ind.# *(N)*	Ital. *(N)*	Maced. *(N)*	Serb. *(N)*	Turk. *(N)*	Viet. *(N)*
Barwon Sth. West.	2	7	16	5	2	5	7	6	5	8
Grampians	2		5	1	2					2
Loddon Mallee	4	5		10	4	45	1	1	5	4
Hume		9	3	5	3	18	4	1	5	4
Gippsland	1	3	4	4	1	11	1	2	10	5
Total Non-Metro.	9	24	28	25	12	79	13	10	25	23
Eastern Metro.	68	324	25	194	108	153	21	8	21	71
Northern Metro.	240	138	39	242	83	426	102	14	227	223
Southern Metro.	65	257	47	192	235	108	16	32	70	225
Western Metro.	124	176	113	164	104	280	102	30	111	406
Total Metropolitan	497	895	224	792	529	967	241	84	428	925
Total Victoria	506	919	252	817	542	1,046	254	94	454	948

NOTE:* Includes all Chinese languages, for example, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hakka, Hokkien.
Includes all Indian languages, for example, Bengali, Hindi, Gujerati, Marathi.

English Language Skills of NESB Children

Of the 8,303 NESB children enrolled in funded preschool programs in August 1994, 2,263 children or 27.3 per cent had limited English language skills. These children are likely to require greater assistance in accessing the preschool program. A regional breakdown of the number of NESB children with limited English language skills is provided in table 6.

Table 6. NESB Children with Limited English by Region

H&CS Region	NESB Chn. *(N)*	Limited English *(N)*	Limited English *(%)*
Barwon Sth. Western	121	22	18.2
Grampians	21	9	42.9
Loddon Mallee	100	15	15.0
Hume	71	8	11.3
Gippsland	76	5	6.6
Total Non-Metro.	389	59	15.2
Eastern Metro.	1,314	285	21.7
Northern Metro.	2,100	621	29.6
Southern Metro.	2,039	577	28.3
Western Metro.	2,461	721	29.3
Total Metropolitan	7,914	2,204	27.9
Total Victoria	8,303	2,263	27.3

Health Card Holders

Number of Health Card Holders

The February data for HC holders and the August monitoring data provide a 'snapshot' of the actual number of HC holders at the time of the two data collections. The funded number of HC holders is the actual number of children who received the HC grant during 1994. The number of funded HC holders is therefore higher than counted in February 1994 and August 1994 as the grant was paid to all children who had been HC holders at any time during 1994 up until 19 August 1994, not just at the time of the data collection.

Of the total number of preschool enrolments, 29.9 per cent were HC holders at the time of the survey in August 1994 compared with 28.0 per cent in February 1994 and 32.5 per cent of all funded enrolments in 1994.

The August data showed that the non-metropolitan regions had a higher proportion of HC holders attending preschool programs than the metropolitan regions, with 7,016 HC holders or 39.2 per cent of non-metropolitan children having HC as compared to 9,332 HC holders or 25.3 per cent of metropolitan children with a HC (see table 7). These percentages were consistent with those obtained in February and across the 1994 funded HC holders. They appear to reflect the hardship being experienced in rural communities due to drought and the rural recession.

Table 7. Health Cards by Region

H&CS Region	HC Funded 1994 (N)	HC February 94 (N)	HC August 94 (N)	Difference (Aug. cf Feb.) (N)	Difference (Aug. cf Feb.) (%)
Barwon South Western	1,783	1,656	1,546	-110	-6.6
Grampians	1,249	1,101	1,114	13	1.2
Loddon Mallee	1,777	1,573	1,561	-12	-0.8
Hume	1,641	1,436	1,475	39	2.7
Gippsland	1,522	1,409	1,320	-89	-6.3
Total Non-Metropolitan	7,972	7,175	7,016	-159	-2.2
Eastern Metropolitan	2,148	1,648	1,713	-65	3.9
Northern Metropolitan	2,280	1,915	2,156	241	12.6
Southern Metropolitan	3,294	2,754	2,995	241	8.8
Western Metropolitan	2,567	2,173	2,468	295	13.6
Total Metropolitan	10,289	8,490	9,332	842	9.9
Total Victoria	18,261	15,665	16,348	683	4.4

Fluctuation in Number of HC Holders

An examination of the regional figures reveals considerable variation in the percentage change in HC holders between February and August 1994, ranging from a decrease of 6.6 per cent in Barwon South Western region to an increase of 13.6 per cent in Western Metropolitan region. Although the non-metropolitan regions still had a higher proportion of HC holders than metropolitan regions in August 1994, a comparison between metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions showed an overall increase in the number of HC holders of 9.9 per cent for the metropolitan regions and a decrease of 2.2 per cent in the number of HC holders for the non-metropolitan regions (see table 7), indicating that the economic situation may have improved more quickly for rural communities than for metropolitan communities.

In August 1994, 549 preschools (43.1 per cent) had more HC holders than they had in February 1994 and 355 preschools (27.8 per cent) had fewer HC holders in August 1994 than they had in February 1994. Of those locations which had a change in the number of HC holders between February and August, only 20 per cent of preschool locations varied by more than three children. The comparative data between February and August 1994 should, however, be treated with some caution as some funded agencies may have been reluctant to ask users for HC details in February as they considered it confidential

information, and this may have led to larger fluctuation in numbers. Hence, there may have been more HC holders in February 1994 than was reflected in the data.

Use of Health Card Grant

The responses to the question in relation to the use of the HC grant indicate that preschools were utilising the grant in a responsible way which benefited the HC holders (table 8).

Of the 1,121 responses to this question, the majority (92.5 per cent) used the HC grant in full (85.9 per cent) or in part (6.6 per cent) to directly benefit families who had a Health Card by reducing fees or giving the grant to HC holders. This figure confirms the findings of the *1994 Preschool Audit* that the vast majority of relevant preschools (approximately 88 per cent) used the HC grant in full or in part to reduce the costs for the HC holders rather than for the operation of the preschool program as a whole.

However, the percentage of preschool locations using the HC grant to reduce the costs across the preschool rather than to directly benefit HC holders was significantly higher in non-metropolitan regions at 14.3 per cent of preschool locations compared to 3.5 per cent of metropolitan locations. It is likely that many families in the rural localities may have been in difficult financial circumstances yet ineligible to receive a HC. It appears rural preschools tried to respond to their communities' situation in a flexible way. However, overall, it is more important that the HC grant is targeted directly to HC holders.

Table 8. Use of HC Grant

Area		For HC Holders	Operation of the Preschool	Combination
Metropolitan	*(N)*	638	25	45
	(%)	90.1	3.5	6.4
Non-metro.	*(N)*	325	59	29
	(%)	78.7	14.3	7.0
State	*(N)*	963	84	74
	(%)	85.9	7.5	6.6

NOTE: 26 preschool locations with children receiving a HC grant did not provide information about the use of the grant.

Fees

Overview

Fee information was collected in both the February and August 1994 data collections. The February *Confirmed Enrolments for 1994* form contained questions on 1994 fee levels as well as enrolment details. Information about 1994 fee levels was received from 1,190 centre-based preschool programs (including 23 non-government schools), 46 mobile and outreach preschool locations and 51 long day care centres, which was a response rate of 98.5 per cent of all funded preschool locations.

Information on fee levels was not collected again in August 1994 via the *Preschool Monitoring Form—1994* as it was unlikely that fees would have changed significantly since the February 1994 data collection. The monitoring data collection did, however, seek information on the number of children paying full and partial fees.

In the following sections, fee levels are examined according to the following sub-groups in the sample:

- All preschool locations other than long day care centres
- Long day care centres
- Non-government schools

Term Fee Charged By Preschool Locations Other Than Long Day Care Centres

The *Confirmed Enrolments for 1994* form requested information about the weekly fee as well as the number of hours of preschool offered each week for this fee. An hourly fee was then calculated by dividing the weekly fee by the hours per week to establish a base that would enable comparisons between preschool locations to be made. A standardised term fee for 1994 was then calculated by multiplying the hourly fee by 10 hours per week, for 10 weeks per term. The fee has been calculated in this way as the data showed that, in February 1994, when the fee information was collected, 64.2 per cent of preschool locations operated for 10 hours per week and 93.5 per cent of preschool locations operated for 40–42 weeks per year.

Table 9 uses the fee nominated by funded agencies as the 'main' or 'standard' fee, even though alternative fee levels charged were requested. It is based on information provided by 1,190 centre based locations and 46 mobile/outreach preschool locations which is a response rate of 98.7 per cent.

Table 9. Statewide Preschool Term Fee

H&CS Area	Median ($)	Mode ($)	Min. ($)	Max. ($)
Metropolitan	100	100	35	1,460
Non-metropolitan	62	50	15	440
Victoria	81	98	15	1,460

Across the State, the fee charged by preschool locations for 1994 ranged from $15 to $1,460 per term, with $100 being the most frequently charged fee. The Statewide *median fee* charged for 1994 was $81 per term. The median was used as the measure of central tendency in preference to the mean (average) as it was not affected by the extreme values.

In general, fee levels were higher in metropolitan areas during 1994 than in non-metropolitan areas with the median fee for metropolitan preschools being $100 per term compared with a median fee level of $62 per term in non-metropolitan preschools.

There was also a considerable difference between metropolitan and non-metropolitan preschools in respect to the fee most frequently charged by preschool management bodies as shown in table 9 ($100 per term and $50 per term respectively). Anecdotal evidence suggests that preschool management bodies in non-metropolitan areas have a higher level of fundraising than those in metropolitan areas which may be a contributing factor to the differences in fee levels.

Hourly Fee Charged By Long Day Care Centres

Long day care centres were requested to provide information on the hourly fee charged for children to attend their centre and whether this fee differed for children attending the preschool program only.

Fee information was provided by 51 long day care centres which was 92.7 per cent of all long day care centres receiving preschool funding in 1994. In the majority of cases (75 per cent), the fee charged by long day care centres for children attending the long day care program was the same as the fee charged for children attending the preschool program only. The following analysis is, therefore, based on the hourly fee nominated as the fee charged to attend the preschool as well as the long day care program.

Fees charged by long day care centres for 1994 ranged from $1 to $15 per hour, with the median fee charged being $2.66 per hour. Fees charged for 1994 by long day care centres are detailed in tables 10 and 11.

Table 10. Hourly Fee for the Preschool Program in Long Day Care Centres

H&CS Area	Median ($)	Mode ($)	Min. ($)	Max. ($)
Metropolitan	2.78	2.60	2.00	15.00
Non-metropolitan	2.40	*	1.00	3.40
Victoria	2.66	2.60	1.00	15.00

* Mode could not be calculated as every program charged a different fee.

Table 11. Most Frequently Charged Long Day Care Centre Fees

Hourly Fee ($)	Long Day Care Centres (N)	Long Day Care Centres (%)
1.00- 1.99	1	2.0
2.00- 2.99	33	64.7
3.00- 3.99	8	15.7
4.00- 4.99	1	2.0
5.00- 6.00	1	2.0
5.00-15.00	7	13.7

The median hourly long day care fee was almost 3 times higher than the median hourly fee of $0.82 for the 1,236 non long day care preschool locations discussed in the previous section, indicating that, in spite of fee increases in 1994, preschool still remains a comparatively low cost program for children. It should be noted, however, that children attending long day care centres have access to the Commonwealth fee relief system which offsets the cost of attending a long day care centre.

Fees Charged By Non-Government Schools for the Preschool Program

Preschool fee information for children attending the preschool program in non-government schools was provided by 23 non-government schools which was 82.1 per cent of all non-government schools receiving preschool funding in 1994. The data shows that fee levels set by non-government schools in 1994 for their preschool program were considerably higher than those for the other 1,213 non long day care preschool locations.

Although the majority of non-government schools (14 schools) offered more than 10 hours of preschool per week for their term fee, the term fees have been recalculated on a 10 hourly basis so that comparisons can be made with other preschool programs. Based on a 10 hour week, fees for 1994 ranged from $40 to $450 per term, with the most frequently charged fee by non-government schools being between $200 and $300 per term (8 non-government schools). The *median fee* charged by non-government schools for 1994 was $250 per term. Fees charged for 1994 by non-government schools (based on a 10 hour week) are detailed in table 12.

Table 12. Most Frequently Charged Non-Government School Fees (10 hour week)

Term Fee ($)	Schools (N)	Schools (%)
40 - 100	5	21.7
100 - 199	2	8.7
200 - 299	8	34.8
300 - 399	3	13.0
400 - 450	5	21.7

An examination of the actual term fee charged by non-government schools (that is, the weekly fee multiplied by 10 weeks), shows that term fees were substantially higher again than those charged by other preschool management bodies. Preschool program term fees, calculated in this way, ranged from $40 to $1,290 per term with the median term fee charged by non-government schools for the preschool program being $440.

Fees Charged According To Funding Category

During 1994, preschool funding was available to funded agencies in four categories:

Basic—$800 per eligible child for one year in a standard preschool program, where there was a minimum of 20 children enrolled and attending.

Isolated Rural—$1,000 per eligible child for one year in an isolated rural centre, where there was a minimum of 15 eligible children who required a preschool program in one locality or across a number of localities.

Small Isolated Rural—$1,500 per eligible child for one year in a small isolated rural preschool with 14 or less children.

Long Day Care Centres—$370 per eligible child for one year where a preschool program was provided in a long day care centre where children who were eligible accessed fee relief and where there was a minimum of 10 eligible preschool aged children attending.

Fees in long day care centres, where the majority of enrolments attracted $370, were discussed above. The following section focuses on the $800, $1,000 and $1,500 categories.

The data shows that fees charged by preschool management bodies in the $800 category were considerably higher than those charged by preschool management bodies in the other two categories. This

result is not surprising as the majority of preschool programs receiving an $800 per capita grant level are in the metropolitan area whereas the majority of preschool programs receiving a per capita grant of $1,000 or $1,500 are located in non-metropolitan areas. However, it should be noted that the median fees for these rural funding categories also differ ($60 compared with $49) and the most commonly charged fee is slightly lower too at preschool locations receiving funding of $1,500 per child.

Table 13 provides an overview of the median, mode and range of fees charged by management bodies within these categories.

Table 13. Fee Charged According to Funding Category

Funding Category	Median ($)	Mode ($)	Min ($)	Max ($)
$800	90	100	30	1,460
$1,000	60	50	34	266
$1,500	49	48	30	100

Fee Charged According to the Number of Health Card (HC) Holders

The following information is based on responses from 1,190 centre-based preschool locations. Excluded from the results were:

- 55 long day care centres which provided fee information per hour, not per term.
- 48 mobile and outreach preschool locations as details of HC holders and fees could not be cross referenced.
- 14 centre-based preschools which did not provide fee information.

An overview of the fee charged by the percentage of HC holders attending the preschool program is contained in table 14.

Table 14. Term Fee Charged According to the Proportion of Health Card Holders

HCs (%)	Median ($)	Mode ($)	Range ($)	Location (N)
0	140	120	40 - 1,460	69
1 - 25	100	100	35 - 1,215	503
26 - 50	76	80	33 - 250	457
51 - 75	70	80	30 - 130	147
76 - 100	46	38	30 -200	14

In general, fees charged by management bodies with a large number of HC holders attending the preschool program were lower than fees charged by preschool management bodies with very few HC holders attending, particularly when the median fees are compared.

These results suggest that preschools with a large number of HC holders charged lower fees to ensure the preschool program was affordable to its users. Not only are these preschools receiving less income through fees than preschools with a small number of HC holders, but it is most likely that they would also have had less capacity for generating income through fund raising activities. In such situations, the HC grant would have been crucial to the operation of the preschool program.

Payment of Fees

As indicated above, the August data collection sought information on the number of children paying full and partial fees. There was some variation between

regions in relation to the number of users paying the full fee (see table 15). Eastern Metropolitan region had the highest percentage of full fees paid at 90.7 per cent and Northern Metropolitan region had the lowest percentage at 81.3 per cent. The percentage of full fees paid for the total metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions was similar at approximately 87 per cent.

Table 15. Fees by Region

H&CS Region	Full Fee Paid *(N)*	Full Fee Paid *(%)*	Chn. Left Due to Fee *(N)*
Barwon South	3,978	87.30	46
Grampians	2,051	85.40	19
Loddon Mallee	3,059	84.60	29
Hume	3,251	87.30	10
Gippsland	3,139	87.1	37
Total Non-Metro.	15,478	86.4	141
Eastern	9,306	90.7	45
Northern	5,701	81.30	87
Southern	10,546	90.4	65
Western	6,790	86.40	64
Total Metro.	32,343	87.9	261
Total Victoria	47,821	87.4	402

These figures clearly indicate that, although the fees have increased across the State compared with 1993, the majority of preschool users (87 per cent) paid the full fee. The majority of the remaining 13 per cent who did not pay full fees are probably on Health Cards for which the preschool would have received the HC grant. (This assumption is based on the findings of the preschool audit which showed that approximately 95 per cent of children who paid partial fees were HC holders).

According to the August 1994 survey, the percentage of eligible children who had left because of the inability to pay the required fee was minimal (being less than 1 per cent). Both the metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions recorded a similar figure of approximately 0.7 per cent.

In addition to the 54,718 funded children enrolled in preschools at the time of the monitoring data survey, a further 1,047 children were recorded in August 1994 as attending preschool programs as unfunded enrolments. These additional enrolments potentially generate extra income for the respective preschools as budget projections did not include fee and fundraising income from these children. Furthermore, their fees may be higher than those for the funded enrolments.

Program Delivery

Introduction

In this section, responses on 1994 program delivery are compared with 1993 data. The information received from the 55 long day care centres has not been included in this comparative analysis as they did not receive preschool funding in 1993. Consequently, the basis for the results is 1,220 preschools, made up of 1,204 centre-based locations and 16 mobile/outreach preschool services. As indicated on page 2, due to the method of data collection, data could not be disaggregated for the 48 locations which formed these 16 services, and they are therefore treated as 16 'locations' in this and subsequent sections.

Number of Preschool Groups
In 1994, the majority of locations were operating the same number of preschool groups as they were in 1993. Information about the number of preschool groups operating in 1994 compared to 1993 was provided by 1,192 preschool locations (that is, 28 locations did not provide information). The results showed that approximately:

- 21 per cent (253 locations) were operating fewer funded 4 year old groups in 1994 than in 1993.
- 5 per cent (63 locations) were operating more funded 4 year old groups in 1994 than in 1993.
- 74 per cent (876 locations) were operating the same number of funded 4 year old groups in 1994 as in 1993.

Number of Children in Groups
The survey also sought information about the number of children in each group. Preschool locations which recorded group sizes in excess of 30 children were excluded from these results as the data indicated that a rotational group program probably operated at these locations. Also, a small number of locations did not respond to this question. In total, 77 preschool locations have not been included in these results, making a basis of 1,143 preschool locations for this information.

The data shows that the average number of children per group was similar for 1993 and 1994 with the average group size for 1993 being 23.3 children compared to 23.4 children in 1994.

The majority of preschools (58.5 per cent) either decreased their group size in 1994 (32.3 per cent or 369 locations) or had the same number of children attending per group as in 1993 (26.2 per cent or 300 locations). The remaining 41.5 per cent of preschools (474 locations) had more children per group in 1994 compared with 1993; most of them (304 locations) increased their group size by 3 children or less.

When the data from the 253 preschool locations operating fewer groups in 1994 than in 1993 (see previous section, Number of Preschool Groups) is examined, it shows that approximately 70 per cent (177 locations) increased their group size by an average of 4 children per group (from an average of 23 children to an average of 27 children), indicating that children were accommodated into fewer groups for these preschools.

For both 1993 and 1994, group sizes in non-metropolitan areas were, on average, smaller than in metropolitan areas by approximately 2 children.

Weekly Hours of Attendance
Agencies were asked to indicate the number of hours per week the majority of children attended the preschool program. There was a very small increase in the average number of hours children attended preschool in 1994 as compared to 1993. Table 16 shows that in 1994, the average number of hours children attended preschool was 10.5, with 10 hours per week being the most frequently given response (64.2 per cent or 783 responses). This figure compares to an average weekly

attendance of 10.4 hours per week in 1993, with 10 hours being the most frequent response (85.2 per cent or 1039 responses).

In 1994, children in non-metropolitan regions attended preschool for an average of 9.8 hours per week compared to an average of 9.9 hours per week in 1993, while in metropolitan regions, children attended preschool for an average of 10.9 hours per week in 1994 compared to an average of 10.7 hours per week in 1993.

Even though the majority of preschools offered the same number of hours of preschool in 1994 as in 1993, the data shows that, in 1994, the non-metropolitan regions had more locations decreasing their weekly hours of attendance (15.7 per cent) than locations which increased their weekly hours of attendance (9.5 per cent), while in metropolitan locations the number of decreases and increases were more similar (with 13.5 per cent and 14.2 per cent respectively).

Table 16. Weekly Hours of Attendance by Number of Preschool Locations

H&CS Region	No Answer (N)	Same Hours (N)	Increased Hours (N)	Decreased Hours (N)	1993 Av. Hours (N)	1994 Av. Hours (N)
Barwon South Western	5	58	22	22	10.0	10.0
Grampians	1	44	4	14	9.9	9.7
Loddon Mallee	2	64	5	12	9.9	9.8
Hume		78	7	7	9.8	9.8
Gippsland	4	71	2	11	10.0	9.8
Total Non-Metropolitan	12	315	40	66	9.9	9.8
Eastern Metropolitan	4	176	36	20	10.7	11.0
Northern Metropolitan	3	105	25	23	10.2	10.5
Southern Metropolitan	10	181	33	22	11.2	11.3
Western Metropolitan	5	91	15	38	10.4	10.3
Total Metropolitan	22	553	109	103	10.7	10.9
Total Victoria	34	868	149	169	10.4	10.5

Program Operation

A response to this question was not provided by 16 preschool locations. The following results are, therefore, based on 1,204 responses.

The trend towards more flexible program delivery patterns is apparent in tables 17 and 18. Table 17 shows sessions of different duration (2½–¾ hours, 3–4 hours and 5+ hours) and the number of sessions of that length which were offered each week (1–6 sessions). A comparatively small number of preschool locations (259

or 21.5 per cent) offered only a traditional sessional model in 1994, that is, 4 sessions of 2½ hours each. The model most frequently nominated was 3 sessions per week of 3–4 hours duration (438 locations or 36.4 per cent). This finding confirms that of the preschool audit which showed that fewer preschools (43.0 per cent) were offering a traditional sessional model in 1994 compared with 1993 (73.6 per cent).

Table 17. Statewide Program Operation

Sessions Per Week	Length of Sessions: 5+ hours (N)	3 - 4 hours (N)	2½ - 2¾ hours (N)
1	5	2	0
2	75	6	0
3	4	438	20
4	84	73	259
5	12	13	1
6	0	1	0
TOTAL	102	533	280

Table 18 gives a regional breakdown of the program delivery patterns shown in table 17. Statewide, there was a common preference for sessions of 3–4 hours duration, with 140 preschool locations or 32.5 per cent of non-metropolitan preschools and 393 preschool locations or 50.7 per cent of metropolitan preschools offering this model. The non-metropolitan regions showed a greater trend towards sessions of 5 or more hours with 67 preschool locations or 15.6 per cent of non-metropolitan preschools offering longer sessions compared with 35 preschool locations or 4.5 per cent of metropolitan preschools. This trend would indicate that effort is being made to meet the needs of rural communities with respect to travel to and from preschools.

Table 18. Program Operation by Region

H&CS Region	Length of Sessions: 5+ hours (N)	3–4 hours (N)	2½–2¾ hours (N)	Other (N)
Barwon South	19	28	18	42
Grampians	9	11	22	20
Loddon Mallee	17	31	20	15
Hume	13	46	16	16
Gippsland	9	24	30	24
Total Non-Metro	67	140	106	117
Eastern Metro	5	103	60	66
Northern Metro	7	80	43	24
Southern Metro	15	119	52	51
Western Metro	8	91	19	31
Total Metro	35	393	174	172
Total Victoria	102	533	280	289

There were 289 preschool locations (24 per cent) that indicated that they offered 'other' hours of preschool to those session lengths nominated in table 17. The most common different arrangements were:

- Different groups of children attended for different lengths of time (97 preschool locations). For example, one group attended for 4 sessions of 2½ hours per week whilst another group attended for 3 sessions of 3½ hours per week.
- All children attended the same number of hours per week, however the length of

sessions varied each day (117 preschool locations). For example, children attended for 2 sessions of 2 hours duration and 2 sessions of 3 hours duration each week.

- Children attended for a combination of one or more longer sessions of 5 or more hours and one or more shorter sessions of up to 3 hours duration (65 preschool locations).

There were 10 'other' responses which did not fit into the above patterns.

Non-metropolitan regions had a slightly higher proportion of 'other' preschool patterns of operation than metropolitan regions, with 27.2 per cent of preschools compared to 22.2 per cent of preschools respectively.

Overall, the variety of models of operation in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions can be seen as an attempt to meet the varied needs of local communities.

Staff Hours

The August survey showed that 1,620 teachers and 1,743 assistants were employed to operate funded four year old programs in 1994. This figure compares with approximately 1,434 teachers and 1,549 assistants who were paid and did not cease employment in 1993 (based on the number of staff who were paid in December 1993). These figures indicate that there was some staff movement prior to the commencement of the 1994 preschool year and during the year, with 13.0 per cent more teachers and 12.5 per cent more assistants employed in the sector in 1994 compared to 1993.

The majority of funded agencies (1,231 or 97.9 per cent) reported that teachers employed at their preschool devoted 50 per cent or more of their total employment hours to teaching time and 26 preschool locations or 2.1 per cent indicated that their teachers devoted less than 50 per cent of their total employment hours to teaching time. A response to this question was not provided by 18 preschool locations.

Volunteer Contribution

Overview

The survey examined the volunteer hours contributed by members of the committee as well as the voluntary input of the general parent body.

In general, the number of volunteer hours contributed by parents per week were similar in metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions. Hence, the analysis of the data focuses on the difference between volunteer hours contributed by parents in independent committee managed preschools and local government managed preschools, as a difference in volunteer contribution was observed depending on the management structure.

Table 19 shows the statewide breakdown of volunteer hours worked by management committee members, the component of committee hours worked by the treasurer and the hours contributed by the general parent body. Results have been recorded by independent committee managed preschools

(COM) and local government managed preschools (LGA). Even though the figures indicate that independent committee managed preschools have a greater reliance on voluntary input than local government managed preschools, it was apparent that all preschool locations relied extensively on volunteer support.

Overall, across the State, volunteers contributed an average of 42 hours per location per week (in both committee and general parent body volunteer time), or the equivalent of one full time staff member. This reliance on volunteer support was also evident in the *1994 Preschool Audit* which found that, for 85 per cent of the committees surveyed, 50 per cent or more of their members were parents and that there was a widespread use of parents as volunteers across a range of activities associated with preschool programs.

Table 19. Statewide Volunteer Hours

		Hours Per Week					Average Hours (N)	No/ Incomplete Response (N)
		0 - 19 (N)	20 - 39 (N)	40 - 59 (N)	60 - 79 (N)	80+ (N)		
Committee Hours Per Week	COM	336	296	94	37	23	25.6	69
	LGA	215	57	11	6	1	14.6	47
	TOTAL	551	353	105	43	24	22.7	116
Treasurer Hours Per Week	COM	733	41	2	1		7.7	78
	LGA	284	2				4.2	51
	TOTAL	1,017	43	2	1	0	6.8	129
General Parent Body Hours Per Week	COM	409	305	63	6	5	18.8	68
	LGA	156	112	27	9	4	20.6	28
	TOTAL	565	417	90	15	9	19.3	96

NOTE: Totals are calculated from responses received from 1,192 locations. The 55 long day care centres and 28 non-government schools have not been included in the results as staff are generally employed to perform the duties undertaken by preschool volunteers.

The Committee of Management

Independent management committees clearly contributed more volunteer hours per week than local government management committees. Independent management committees contributed, on average, 25.6 volunteer hours per week compared with local government management committees which contributed, on average, 14.6 volunteer hours per week.

The difference between the average number of hours per week contributed by independent management committees and local government management committees was greater in metropolitan regions than in non-metropolitan regions. These figures suggest that there is greater local

government involvement in metropolitan preschool programs thus reducing the need for input from parental advisory committees.

Treasurer Hours

The survey showed that treasurers contributed a comparatively high proportion of committee hours, on average, approximately 30 per cent or 6.8 hours of total committee volunteer hours. This figure is comparable with that found in the *1994 Preschool Audit* sample which showed that treasurers contributed 25 per cent of volunteer committee hours or an average of 9 hours per week. The results were similar for both the metropolitan regions and the non-metropolitan regions.

The General Parent Body

In addition to the volunteer hours contributed by parents on management committees, a high level of general parental support was contributed to the overall operation of the preschool program. This general parent contribution included such tasks as the 'duty roster', fund raising, equipment repairs, working bees and production of the newsletter.

Results showed that the general parent body contributed an average of 19.3 hours per week, with the general parent body in local government managed preschools contributing slightly more volunteer hours than the general parent body in independent committee managed preschools (20.6 hours per week and 18.8 hours per week respectively). This difference could be due to parents in local government managed preschools possibly including hours contributed to the day to day management of preschools in these results, whereas independent committees may have included hours contributed to day to day management under committee of management volunteer hours (see previous section,'The Committee of Management', page 30).

The general parent body of preschools in metropolitan regions contributed approximately 2 hours more per week on average than the general parent body of preschools in non-metropolitan regions for both independent committee managed preschools and local government managed preschools.

Support Services

The survey canvassed use of a number of preschool support services at any time during 1994 (up until August 1994). Although some of the support services were aimed at a specific target group—for example, the Multicultural Resource Centre is funded to primarily support preschool locations with NESB children—the number of preschools which access each support category indicated that there was a need for each type of support service. For example, the generic support services of KPV and Payline were in high demand with regard to management, administration and financial management advice due to the implementation of the grants payment system and the consequent changes to management responsibilities. A regional breakdown of use of support services is provided in table 20 and an analysis of the use of each service follows.

Table 20. Use of Support Services by Region

H&CS Region	KPV		LADY GOWRIE		MRC		PAYLINE		PSFO	
	(N)	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*	*(N)*	*(%)*
Barwon South Western	65	59.6	32	29.4	8	22.9	61	89.7	86	78.9
Grampians	56	88.9	17	27.0	4	28.6	52	94.5	45	71.4
Loddon Mallee	67	78.8	27	31.8	0	0	56	84.8	53	62.4
Hume	72	77.4	28	30.1	7	18.9	48	90.6	70	75.3
Gippsland	61	67.8	38	42.2	11	39.3	28	70.0	79	87.8
Total Non-Metropolitan	321	73.0	142	32.3	30	21.4	245	90.0	333	75.7
Eastern Metropolitan	167	66.8	89	35.6	50	27.5	149	86.1	142	56.8
Northern Metropolitan	105	63.6	61	37.0	59	44.7	89	71.2	136	82.4
Southern Metropolitan	180	67.7	83	31.2	59	31.1	175	84.5	188	70.7
Western Metropolitan	59	38.3	62	40.3	58	41.7	43	66.2	138	89.6
Total Metropolitan	511	61.2	295	35.3	226	35.1	456	80.0	604	72.3
Total Victoria	832	65.3	437	34.3	256	32.3	701	82.0	937	73.5

NOTE: The percentages in table 20 have been calculated using total number of locations (1,275 locations) with the exception of those for Payline, where local government managed preschools, long day care centres and non-government schools have been excluded (855 locations), and MRC, where percentages have been calculated using the total number of locations with NESB enrolments (783 locations)

Kindergarten Parents Victoria (KPV)

The KPV is a peak organisation for preschool management committees which provides advice and support to preschool committees on administrative, management and financial issues. The results showed that 65.3 per cent of all preschool programs utilised KPV during 1994 with the non-metropolitan region having a higher utilisation rate (73.0 per cent) than the metropolitan regions (61.2 per cent). The high rate of non-metropolitan utilisation of KPV is notable given that the organisation's office is located in an inner suburb of Melbourne.

It should also be noted that local government managed preschools, being unable to access the full range of KPV services, and long day care centres and non-government schools are less likely than independent committee managed preschools to be a member of the KPV, that is, independent volunteer committees are KPV's main target group.

When local government managed preschools, long day care centres and non-government schools are excluded from the results, the utilisation rate is higher still with 85.0 per cent of independent volunteer committee managed preschools (or 727 locations) accessing KPV. This figure compares to 28.4 per cent of local government managed locations using KPV. A high proportion of the target group,

therefore, used KPV's services during 1994.

Lady Gowrie Child Centre
The Lady Gowrie Child Centre offers a statewide training program for preschool and child care staff. The statewide utilisation of Lady Gowrie was 34.3 per cent, with the metropolitan regions showing a slightly higher utilisation rate (35.3 per cent) than the non-metropolitan regions (32.3 per cent). Although this figure appears low compared to the other support services, Lady Gowrie Child Centre is meeting the targets as required under the Funding and Service Agreement with H&CS and participation at individual training sessions is on target. This service will continue to be promoted widely to preschools so that staff from a larger proportion of preschools attend over a two to three year period.

Multicultural Resource Centre (MRC)
The MRC provides advice and support to enhance the access and participation of NESB children in preschool programs. The following results are based on information provided by preschool locations with NESB children enrolled in August 1994, that is, 783 preschool locations. The number of NESB children enrolled varied significantly from location to location, ranging from one NESB child to 88 NESB children.

The figures show that 256 preschool locations or 32.3 per cent of those preschools with NESB children enrolled had used the MRC. The utilisation rate of preschools in metropolitan regions was significantly higher at 35.1 per cent than for preschools in non-metropolitan regions at 21.4 per cent. This higher level of utilisation of the MRC by metropolitan preschools may be explained by the MRC having been directed to assist those preschool locations with the highest level of need. In terms of target population, there are significantly more NESB children attending preschools in metropolitan areas than in non-metropolitan areas with 7,914 (95.3 per cent) NESB enrolments in metropolitan regions compared with 389 (4.7 per cent) NESB enrolments in the non-metropolitan regions (see table 4). In addition, a further 40 preschool locations that did not have NESB children enrolled in August 1994 used the MRC support service. This figure suggests that these preschool locations either had NESB children enrolled at some stage in 1994 or that they were utilising the cultural support offered by the MRC.

A detailed breakdown of NESB data from the August 1994 survey has been provided to the MRC to assist it in targeting its work to preschools with the highest numbers of NESB children and particularly those with limited English language skills.

Payline
The Payline preschool payroll support service is targeted to independent preschool committees of management only, not local government preschools, child care centres or non-government schools. The target population was, therefore, 883 preschool locations. Payline was used extensively by independent committee managed preschools in all regions (79.4 per cent of preschool locations), with the non-metropolitan

regions showing a higher access rate (87.6 per cent) than the metropolitan regions (79.4 per cent). Grampians region had the highest utilisation rate at 92.9 per cent compared with Western Metropolitan region which had the lowest utilisation rate at 63.2 per cent.

Preschool Field Officers (PSFO)
PSFOs facilitate the access of children with additional needs into generic programs. Throughout Victoria, PSFOs were utilised by 73.5 per cent of preschool locations. The access level was similar for both the metropolitan regions (72.3 per cent) and the non-metropolitan regions (75.7 per cent). This represents a high level of use of this specialist service.

Conclusion

As indicated in the Introduction to this report, it is the Victorian Government's policy to provide access to one year of preschool for all Victorian children prior to the year of entry into the formal education system. During 1994, the Government provided funding to 1,275 preschools across 1,307 locations.

The changes to the way in which preschools received funding in 1994 had raised community concerns that there would be a major drop in enrolments as families would be excluded due to increased fee levels. However, an analysis of the data showed that preschool programs were well utilised.

Overall, the participation rate in preschool programs were still very high with 93.3 per cent of the eligible 4 year old population having a preschool experience in 1994, after the population was adjusted for changes to the school entry age. While preschool fee levels were higher than in previous years, the results from the preschool monitoring survey showed that only 0.7 per cent of children had left preschool in 1994 due to the inability to pay fees (as at 1 August 1994).

On the other hand, only half the estimated number of eligible Koorie children actually attended a preschool program in 1994. The reason for this low participation rate of Koorie children is not clear as this issue was not canvassed by the survey. However, the survey did show that a significant number of Koorie children left preschool locations due to the inability to pay fees and family movement.

Children from a non-English speaking background comprised 15.2 per cent of the 1994 preschool population. These children were mainly concentrated in the departmental metropolitan regions. It is interesting to note that NESB enrolments increased considerably (5.6 per cent) between February 1994 and August 1994, indicating that NESB families may be unaware of the availability of preschool programs at the start of the preschool year.

Approximately 30 per cent of 1994 enrolments were Health Card holders. A higher proportion of these children were in the departmental non-metropolitan regions, reflecting the economic hardship faced by rural communities. The vast majority of funded agencies used the extra funding provided by the department for Health Card holders to reduce fees to these families, thus also ensuring that this funding was targeted to the families who actually hold Health Cards.

There was a trend towards greater flexibility in program delivery in 1994 with only 21.5 per cent of preschool locations offering a traditional sessional model. The average number of hours for which children attended preschool each week remained relatively consistent between 1993 and 1994 but, in many cases, the arrangement of these hours changed to meet the needs of the community.

It appears that the initial fears that preschool programs would either have to close or increase fees beyond the reach of consumers in order to operate in 1994

under the new funding conditions were unfounded. However, it is acknowledged that parents and committees are contributing a large number of volunteer hours to maintain the operation of the preschool programs.